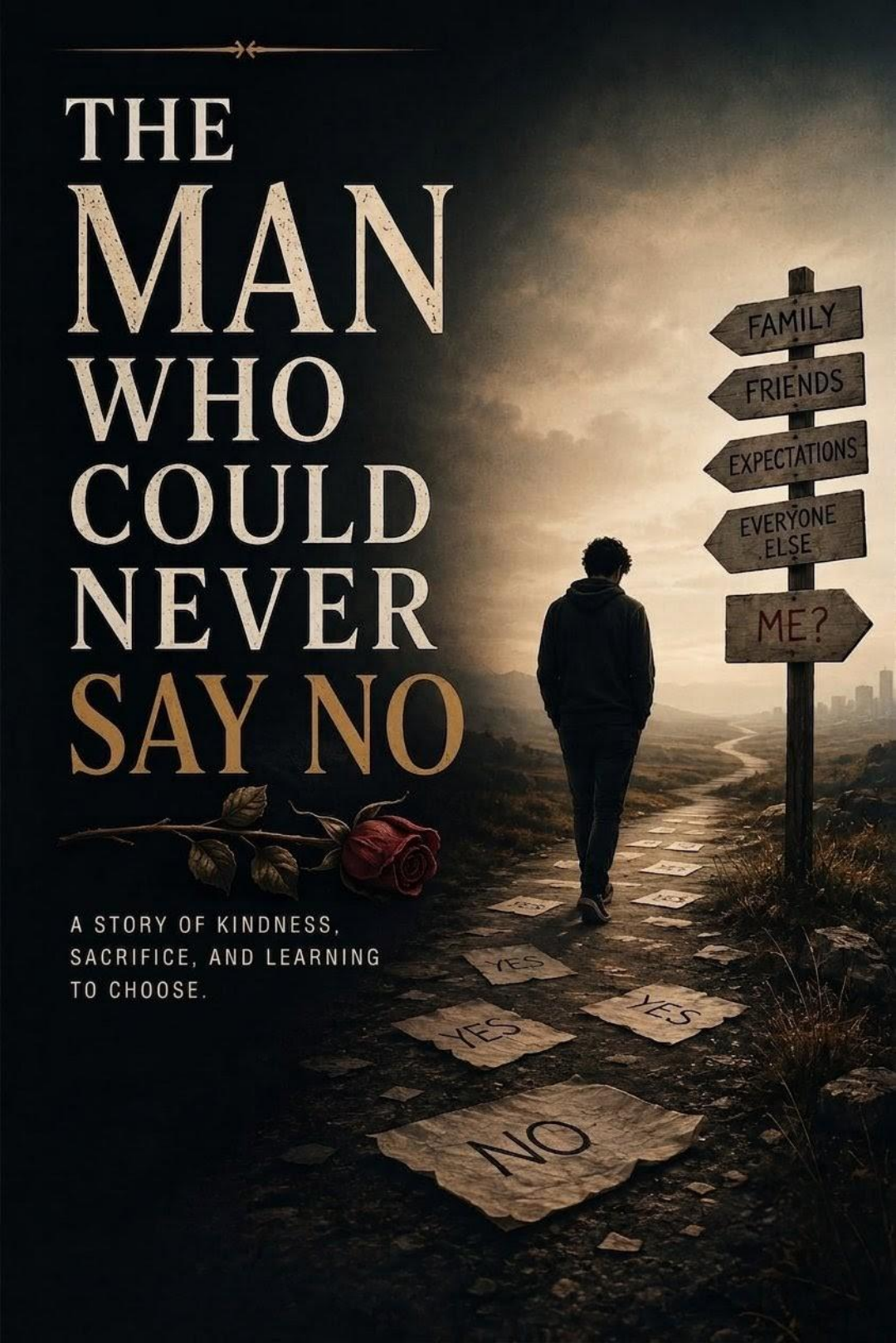
THE MAN WHO COULD NEVER SAY NO



A STORY OF KINDNESS, SACRIFICE, AND LEARNING TO CHOOSE.

THE MAN WHO COULD NEVER SAY NO

An Inspirational Novel

By

Abdul Rafay

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Written by Abdul Rafay

Dedication

To my parents,

For every sacrifice you made,
for every sleepless night,
for every prayer whispered in silence,
and for every dream you carried for me.

Everything I am today is because of your love.

To my sisters,

May your dreams be bigger than your fears,
your smiles brighter than your struggles,
and your future more beautiful than you can imagine.

This book is for you.

Author's Note

This book is about a young man who spent most of his life trying to make everyone happy.

For years, I believed that kindness meant sacrifice, that love meant putting others before myself, and that saying "no" was selfish.

I carried responsibilities that were heavy for my age. I worried about my family's future, my parents' happiness, and the dreams of those I loved. Whenever someone needed help, I was there. Whenever someone asked for something, I agreed.

But every "yes" came with a price.

This story is a reflection of the lessons, struggles, and emotions that shaped me. While some events have been adapted through storytelling, the feelings behind them are real.

If you have ever felt responsible for everyone else's happiness while forgetting your own, I hope you find a part of yourself within these pages.

This is the Story of Abdul Rafay.

Prologue

The Cost of One More Yes

My phone vibrated at exactly 9:17 in the morning.

I looked down at the screen and froze.

The email had finally arrived.

For months, I had been waiting for this moment.

The subject line read:

"Congratulations, Abdul Rafay."

My heart raced as I opened the message.

Out of hundreds of applicants, I had been selected for a prestigious technology internship—an opportunity that could change my future forever.

I could already imagine everything that might come next. Experience. Connections. Financial stability. The first real step toward building the business I had always dreamed of creating.

For a moment, I allowed myself to smile.

Then my phone rang.

It was my mother.

I answered immediately.

"Assalamu Alaikum, Mama."

"Wa Alaikum Assalam, beta. I need your help today."

Those words had followed me my entire life.

I need your help.

And just like always, before she could even explain what she needed, the answer was already leaving my mouth.

"Yes, Mama."

I had no idea that this simple word would cost me far more than I could imagine.

"Can you come with me to your aunt's house?" she asked. "I need help carrying some things, and your uncle isn't available."

I looked back at the email on my screen.

The internship orientation was scheduled for noon.

Attendance was mandatory.

My eyes moved between the email and my mother's contact name.

For a few seconds, I considered explaining.

I considered saying that this was important.

I considered putting myself first.

But the thought disappeared almost as quickly as it had arrived.

"Of course, Mama," I said.

"Thank you, beta. I knew I could count on you."

Those words should have made me happy.

Instead, they left a strange weight in my chest.

By the time we returned home, the afternoon sun was already beginning to fade.

I rushed to my laptop.

My hands trembled as I opened my inbox.

There was another email.

This one was shorter.

Much shorter.

My eyes locked onto a single sentence.

"Due to your absence from the mandatory orientation session, your position has been offered to another candidate."

I read it once.

Then twice.

Then a third time.

The words never changed.

The opportunity I had dreamed about for months was gone.

Not because I wasn't talented.

Not because I wasn't qualified.

Not because I hadn't worked hard enough.

It was gone because I couldn't say one simple word.

No.

That evening, everyone continued with their lives as if nothing had happened.

No one knew what I had lost.

No one knew what I was feeling.

And I didn't tell them.

Because that was another thing I had become very good at.

Carrying disappointment in silence.

Looking back now, I realize that this was not the day my problems began.

It was simply the day I finally noticed them.

The truth is, my story started many years earlier.

It started with a boy who wanted everyone around him to be happy.

A boy who believed that love had to be earned.

A boy who never learned how to say no.

Chapter 1

The Reliable Man

People often called me reliable.

My teachers called me reliable.

My friends called me reliable.

My relatives called me reliable.

Even complete strangers seemed to learn very quickly that if they needed help, they only had to ask.

And I would say yes.

At twenty-one years old, I was a computer engineering student living in Karachi. Most people who looked at my life saw an ordinary young man trying to build a better future.

What they didn't see were the responsibilities I carried every day.

My dreams were never just my dreams.

When I imagined success, I didn't picture expensive cars or luxury vacations.

I pictured my parents living comfortably.

I pictured my sisters achieving every goal they set for themselves.

I pictured a future where money was no longer something we worried about.

I wanted to build a business.

Not because I wanted to become rich.

But because I wanted the people I loved to have everything they deserved.

That dream was what pushed me forward every morning.

It was also what made it impossible for me to refuse anyone.

The day usually began before sunrise.

I would wake up, check my messages, review my assignments, and prepare for classes.

Before I even left my room, there would already be requests waiting for me.

"Can you fix my laptop?"

"Can you help me with this project?"

"Can you explain this programming problem?"

"Can you come with me somewhere?"

"Can you do me a small favor?"

The favors were always small.

At least individually.

Together, they slowly consumed entire days.

But I never complained.

Helping people made me feel useful.

Needed.

Important.

The problem was that I had started measuring my value by how much I could do for others.

And that is a dangerous way to live.

I didn't understand that yet.

Back then, I thought I was simply being a good person.

I had no idea that every yes was quietly teaching the world that my time, my energy, and my dreams could always wait.

One Tuesday morning, I sat at my desk with a notebook open in front of me.

An important programming assignment was due in three days.

I had promised myself that I would finish at least half of it before lunch.

For once, I was determined to focus on my own work.

I opened my laptop and began typing.

Five minutes later, my phone buzzed.

It was a classmate.

"Bro, can you help me understand this coding problem?"

I stared at the message.

I knew exactly what would happen if I replied.

Five minutes would become thirty.

Thirty minutes would become an hour.

An hour would become half the day.

Still, my fingers moved across the keyboard.

"Sure."

A few minutes later, another message arrived.

This time it was from a friend.

"Can you review my presentation before I submit it?"

Again, I answered.

"Of course."

By noon, my assignment remained untouched.

I had spent the entire morning solving other people's problems.

As strange as it sounds, I wasn't angry.

I was proud.

Proud that people trusted me.

Proud that people depended on me.

Proud that I could help.

But beneath that pride was something I didn't want to admit.

Exhaustion.

The kind that doesn't come from hard work.

The kind that comes from constantly carrying everyone else's expectations.

That evening, I sat on the rooftop of our house and watched the lights of Karachi stretch into the distance.

The city never seemed to stop moving.

Neither did I.

My mother stepped outside carrying two cups of tea.

She handed one to me and sat beside me.

"You look tired, beta," she said.

I forced a smile.

"I'm okay."

She looked at me for a moment.

Mothers have a way of seeing through answers like that.

"You work too much," she said softly.

I laughed.

"Someone has to."

She smiled but didn't respond.

For a while, we sat in silence.

The cool evening breeze moved through the air.

It should have felt peaceful.

Instead, my mind was filled with unfinished tasks, unanswered messages, and responsibilities waiting for me tomorrow.

I didn't realize it then, but I was slowly becoming a person who belonged to everyone except himself.

There was another part of me that very few people knew about.

A dream I rarely spoke about.

Football.

Not the kind people watched casually on television.

The kind that made your heart race.

The kind that made you imagine packed stadiums, cheering crowds, and wearing your country's colors with pride.

Ever since I was a child, I loved football.

Whenever life became overwhelming, I would find a ball, a field, and a little bit of freedom.

For ninety minutes, the worries disappeared.

No assignments.

No responsibilities.

No expectations.

Just me and the game.

I wasn't the best player.

I knew that.

But deep inside, a small part of me still dreamed of becoming a professional footballer.

It felt impossible.

A boy from Karachi.

A computer engineering student.

The eldest son carrying responsibilities.

Dreams like that seemed unrealistic.

So I kept them hidden.

Whenever people asked about my future, I talked about technology.

I talked about business.

I talked about financial success.

I never talked about football.

Not because I had stopped loving it.

But because life had convinced me that some dreams were luxuries.

And luxuries were things I couldn't afford.

One Saturday evening, my friends invited me to play a local football match.

I had been waiting for that game all week.

For once, I planned to do something for myself.

I cleaned my boots.

Prepared my kit.

Charged my phone.

I was ready.

Then my phone rang.

"Mama."

I already knew what was coming.

"Beta, can you take your sister to her coaching class? Your uncle can't make it today."

I looked at my football boots.

Then at the clock.

Then at the message from my friends asking where I was.

For a brief moment, I wanted to say no.

Just this once.

Just one evening.

Just one match.

But the word never came.

"Okay, Mama."

By the time I returned home, the match had ended.

My friends had won.

They shared photos in the group chat.

Everyone looked happy.

I stared at the pictures for a long time.

Not because I was angry.

Because I felt something worse.

Forgotten.

Once again, I had chosen everyone else's priorities over my own.

And once again, nobody even realized I had made a sacrifice.

That night, lying in bed, I asked myself a question that made me uncomfortable.

What if I spent my entire life helping everyone else achieve their dreams while abandoning my own?

The thought stayed with me long after the lights were turned off.

The next morning, I woke up earlier than usual.

The question from the night before was still sitting in my mind.

What if I spent my entire life helping everyone else achieve their dreams while abandoning my own?

I tried to ignore it.

After all, there were more important things to think about.

Classes.

Assignments.

Family responsibilities.

Messages waiting for replies.

The usual routine.

As I walked through the streets of Karachi later that afternoon, I noticed something strange.

Every person seemed to be moving toward something.

A goal.

A destination.

A dream.

Some walked with confidence.

Others looked lost.

But at least they were moving in a direction they had chosen.

I wasn't sure I could say the same about myself.

For years, I had been reacting to life instead of creating it.

Every request became my priority.

Every problem became my responsibility.

Every expectation became my burden.

And somehow, my own goals always ended up at the bottom of the list.

That evening, I opened a notebook.

On the first page, I wrote three things.

Build a business.

Support my family.

Become the best version of myself.

I stared at the list.

Then I realized something important.

None of these goals would happen if I continued living the way I was living.

For the first time in a long time, I felt afraid.

Not of failure.

Not of hard work.

Not of sacrifice.

I was afraid of reaching thirty years old and discovering that I had spent my entire youth living for everyone except myself.

Outside my window, the city continued its endless noise.

Cars moved through crowded streets.

People rushed home from work.

Life carried on.

But something had changed inside me.

Only a little.

Only enough to make me uncomfortable.

Only enough to make me start asking questions.

Questions I had spent years avoiding.

And sometimes, a single question is enough to change the direction of an entire life.

I didn't know it yet, but the answers were coming.

And they would force me to confront the one word I had feared my entire life.

No.

Chapter 2

Dreams Deferred

Everyone asked me what I wanted to become.

The answer depended on who was asking.

If it was a relative, I would say I wanted to become a successful computer engineer.

If it was a teacher, I would talk about technology and innovation.

If it was a friend, I would tell them I wanted to start my own business one day.

All of those answers were true.

But none of them were the complete truth.

The complete truth was much more complicated.

I wanted to build a life where my parents never had to worry about money again.

I wanted to see my sisters achieve every dream they had ever talked about.

I wanted to create opportunities for the people I loved.

And somewhere deep inside, hidden beneath all those responsibilities, I wanted to become a footballer.

Not famous.

Not necessarily rich.

Just good enough to play professionally.

Good enough to prove to myself that the dream wasn't impossible.

But life has a way of forcing choices upon people.

And every year that passed seemed to push football further away from me.

My days became filled with lectures, assignments, family responsibilities, and helping other people solve their problems.

The dream remained alive.

But only barely.

One afternoon, I was sitting with a group of friends after class.

The conversation shifted toward the future.

Everyone seemed excited.

One friend wanted to move abroad.

Another wanted to work for a major software company.

A third wanted to pursue higher studies.

Then someone asked me.

"What about you, Abdul?"

I smiled.

"I want to start a business."

"What kind of business?"

"A technology company."

The words came out confidently.

And I meant them.

I had spent years imagining it.

A company built from nothing.

A company that would create opportunities.

A company that would make my family proud.

The group nodded with approval.

It sounded practical.

Responsible.

Safe.

Nobody asked what I had given up in order to choose that dream.

Nobody knew about the football matches I had missed.

The training sessions I had skipped.

The opportunities I had ignored.

Because whenever there was a conflict between my dreams and someone else's needs, my dreams were always the ones that lost.

A few weeks later, an opportunity appeared.

A local football academy was holding trials.

One of my friends sent me the details.

"Bro, you should go."

I laughed.

"You're joking."

"I'm serious."

"I haven't trained properly in months."

"So what? At least try."

I looked at the message for a long time.

Part of me wanted to delete it.

Another part couldn't stop imagining what might happen if I went.

For days, I thought about it.

Finally, I decided.

I would attend.

Just once.

Just to see where I stood.

The night before the trial, I prepared everything.

My boots.

My clothes.

My documents.

For the first time in a long time, I felt excited about something that belonged entirely to me.

The next morning, I woke up early.

Ready.

Motivated.

Hopeful.

Then my phone rang.

A relative needed help.

A task that would take only a few hours.

A favor that couldn't wait.

At least that was how it was presented to me.

And just like always, I said yes.

The trial started without me.

By the time I finished helping, it was already over.

I told myself it wasn't a big deal.

I told myself there would be other opportunities.

I told myself I had made the right decision.

But deep inside, I knew the truth.

The opportunity hadn't been taken from me.

I had given it away.

That realization stayed with me for days.

Not because of football.

Because of what it represented.

Every missed opportunity in my life seemed to follow the same pattern.

Someone asked.

I agreed.

My plans disappeared.

And then I convinced myself it didn't matter.

But it did matter.

Every dream abandoned leaves a mark.

Every sacrifice leaves a scar.

The problem was not that I helped people.

The problem was that I didn't know where to stop.

I didn't know how to protect my own future.

I didn't know how to choose myself.

One evening, my younger sister sat beside me while I worked on my laptop.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Working on an idea."

"For your business?"

I smiled.

"Hopefully."

She looked at the screen.

Then she looked at me.

"You'll do it one day."

"What?"

"Build your company."

I laughed.

"Insha'Allah."

She nodded.

Then she said something I will never forget.

"You always help everyone else. I hope one day you help yourself too."

For a moment, I didn't know what to say.

Because sometimes the people who know us best can see things we spend years trying to ignore.

That night, I couldn't sleep.

My sister's words echoed through my mind.

I hope one day you help yourself too.

The truth was painful.

I didn't know how.

For twenty-one years, my value had been connected to what I could do for other people.

Without that, who was I?

The question frightened me.

But for the first time, I didn't run from it.

Instead, I wrote it down in my notebook.

Who am I when I stop living for everyone else?

I stared at the question for several minutes.

Then I closed the notebook.

Outside, Karachi was alive with noise, traffic, and movement.

Inside, another journey had quietly begun.

The journey toward discovering a life that belonged not only to everyone around me—but also to me.

Chapter 3

The Weight of Expectations

The older I became, the more people expected from me.

At first, I didn't mind.

In fact, I welcomed it.

Being needed made me feel important.

It gave me purpose.

Whenever someone called my name, I felt useful.

Whenever someone asked for help, I felt valued.

What I didn't realize was that there is a difference between being valued and being available.

Unfortunately, I spent years confusing the two.

As the months passed, my responsibilities continued to grow.

My parents depended on me.

My sisters depended on me.

My friends depended on me.

Even classmates I barely knew somehow found their way into my messages asking for help.

Sometimes I wondered how people always seemed to know I would say yes.

Maybe it was written on my face.

Or maybe people naturally recognize those who never refuse.

One afternoon, I was working on a business idea.

Nothing serious.

Just notes.

Plans.

Dreams.

The kind of ideas that excite you when nobody else is watching.

I had spent nearly three hours researching websites, marketing strategies, and startup stories.

For once, I felt productive.

For once, I felt like I was investing in my future.

Then my phone vibrated.

A friend needed help with an assignment.

Another friend wanted advice about a project.

A relative needed assistance with a computer problem.

One request became another.

Then another.

Then another.

By evening, my notebook remained open on the same page.

Nothing had been completed.

My business idea was exactly where I had left it.

Waiting.

Just like it always did.

That night, frustration followed me into bed.

Not because I had helped people.

Because I had once again abandoned my own goals.

I stared at the ceiling.

The room was dark.

The city outside remained awake.

And for the first time, I asked myself a question I had never dared to ask before.

Would anyone make the same sacrifices for me?

The answer arrived immediately.

I didn't know.

And that uncertainty hurt more than I expected.

A few days later, I met some friends for football.

The game lasted less than two hours.

The happiness lasted much longer.

Every time I stepped onto the field, I felt alive.

The pressure disappeared.

The expectations disappeared.

The endless requests disappeared.

For a short time, I wasn't someone's son.

Someone's friend.

Someone's helper.

I was simply Abdul Rafay.

A young man chasing a football under the evening sky.

When the match ended, one of my friends walked beside me.

"You should play more often," he said.

I smiled.

"I wish I could."

"Then why don't you?"

The question sounded simple.

But the answer wasn't.

How could I explain years of responsibility?

How could I explain the guilt that appeared whenever I chose myself?

How could I explain that every personal decision felt selfish?

I couldn't.

So I simply shrugged.

"Life."

He nodded.

But I don't think he understood.

Most people didn't.

Because from the outside, my life looked normal.

Only I knew how exhausted I felt.

Only I knew how many dreams were sitting untouched inside notebooks and folders.

Only I knew how many opportunities had quietly slipped away.

Weeks passed.

The pressure continued building.

University became more demanding.

Family responsibilities increased.

Financial worries appeared more often.

The future felt closer than ever.

One evening, while scrolling through social media, I saw an old school friend.

He had launched an online business.

Nothing massive.

Nothing revolutionary.

But it was real.

He had started.

That was enough.

I stared at the screen longer than I should have.

Not because I was jealous.

Because I realized something uncomfortable.

While others were building their dreams, I was still postponing mine.

Waiting for the perfect time.

Waiting until everyone else's needs were satisfied.

Waiting until life became easier.

Deep down, I knew that day would never come.

There would always be another responsibility.

Another favor.

Another problem.

Another reason to delay my own goals.

The realization hit me like a punch.

Maybe the biggest obstacle in my life wasn't my circumstances.

Maybe it was my inability to protect my time.

To protect my energy.

To protect my future.

That night, I opened my notebook once again.

Beneath my business plans, I wrote a sentence.

"If I don't fight for my dreams, nobody else will."

I read it several times.

The words felt strange.

Almost selfish.

But they were true.

The next sentence was even harder to write.

"My dreams matter too."

For several seconds, I stared at the page.

Then I closed the notebook.

Outside, life continued as usual.

Cars moved through the crowded streets of Karachi.

Families shared dinner.

Students prepared for exams.

Friends laughed together.

Everything looked the same.

But inside me, something was changing.

Not dramatically.

Not all at once.

Just enough to make me realize that carrying everyone else's expectations was slowly crushing my own.

And sooner or later, something would have to change.

Because even the strongest person eventually breaks when they spend their entire life carrying weight that was never meant to be theirs alone.

Chapter 4

Losing Myself

There is a type of exhaustion that sleep cannot fix.

I didn't understand that at first.

Whenever I felt tired, I blamed my schedule.

Whenever I felt stressed, I blamed university.

Whenever I felt overwhelmed, I blamed responsibilities.

But the truth was much deeper.

I wasn't tired because I was working hard.

I was tired because I was living for everyone except myself.

Every day felt the same.

Wake up.

Study.

Help someone.

Solve a problem.

Reply to messages.

Handle responsibilities.

Go to sleep.

Repeat.

Days became weeks.

Weeks became months.

And somewhere along the way, I stopped asking myself what I wanted.

The scary part was that nobody noticed.

Not because people didn't care.

Because I had become too good at hiding it.

I smiled when I was exhausted.

I said "I'm fine" when I wasn't.

I said "No problem" when it was a problem.

I made everything look easy.

And when you make everything look easy, people assume it is.

One afternoon, I sat alone in my room staring at my laptop.

A document titled Business Ideas remained open on the screen.

I had created it nearly a year ago.

Inside were pages filled with plans.

Ideas.

Goals.

Dreams.

Yet almost none of them had moved beyond that stage.

They remained ideas.

Not because I lacked talent.

Not because I lacked determination.

Because every time I tried to work on them, life demanded something else from me.

At least that was the excuse I kept telling myself.

The truth was harder to accept.

I had become afraid of disappointing others.

Even when it meant disappointing myself.

My phone buzzed.

Another request.

Another favor.

Another person needing help.

Without thinking, I replied.

"Sure."

A few seconds later, I closed my laptop.

My business could wait.

Again.

That evening, I looked in the mirror.

For a moment, I barely recognized the person staring back.

Not physically.

Emotionally.

The young man looking back at me seemed lost.

He was moving.

Working.

Helping.

Surviving.

But he wasn't growing.

He wasn't becoming the person he wanted to be.

And deep down, he knew it.

A few days later, I joined a football match with friends.

The field wasn't perfect.

The goals were old.

The grass was uneven.

But none of that mattered.

For ninety minutes, I felt free.

Every pass.

Every run.

Every shot.

Every drop of sweat.

It reminded me of a version of myself I had almost forgotten.

The version that had dreams.

The version that felt alive.

The version that wasn't constantly carrying everyone else's expectations.

When the match ended, I sat alone for a few minutes.

Watching the sunset.

Listening to distant traffic.

Feeling something I hadn't felt in a long time.

Peace.

Then my phone rang.

Reality calling once again.

Responsibilities waiting.

People needing things.

The peace disappeared instantly.

As I walked home, a question entered my mind.

What would happen if I stopped saying yes?

The thought scared me.

What if people became upset?

What if they thought I was selfish?

What if they stopped depending on me?

Even worse...

What if they stopped loving me?

That was the fear hiding beneath everything.

Not rejection.

Not failure.

Abandonment.

For years, I had convinced myself that being useful made me valuable.

That helping people made me worthy.

That saying yes earned love.

But if that was true, then who was I without those things?

Who was Abdul Rafay when he wasn't solving someone's problem?

Who was Abdul Rafay when he wasn't sacrificing something?

I didn't have an answer.

And that terrified me.

The following week became one of the hardest weeks of my life.

University deadlines piled up.

Family responsibilities increased.

Financial pressure grew stronger.

Friends continued asking for help.

I felt trapped.

Pulled in ten different directions at once.

One night, after everyone had gone to sleep, I sat alone in complete silence.

The house was quiet.

The city outside had slowed down.

For the first time in months, nobody needed anything from me.

No messages.

No calls.

No favors.

No expectations.

Just silence.

And in that silence, I realized something painful.

I had spent so much time taking care of everyone else that I had forgotten how to take care of myself.

The realization hit harder than I expected.

Because it was true.

I encouraged others to follow their dreams.

Yet I ignored my own.

I helped others solve problems.

Yet I ignored my own struggles.

I listened when others needed support.

Yet I never spoke when I needed support myself.

I had become a stranger to my own needs.

A stranger to my own happiness.

A stranger to myself.

Tears filled my eyes.

Not because of one specific moment.

Because of years of moments.

Years of sacrifices.

Years of putting myself last.

Years of believing that my dreams could wait.

That night, I made a promise.

A small promise.

A quiet promise.

A promise that nobody else would hear.

But one that would change everything.

I promised myself that one day, I would stop apologizing for having dreams.

I would stop feeling guilty for wanting more from life.

I would stop treating my own future as less important than everyone else's.

I didn't know how.

I didn't know when.

But for the first time, I knew something had to change.

Because I was tired.

Not physically.

Not mentally.

Spiritually.

And if nothing changed, eventually there would be nothing left of me to give.

The man who could never say no was finally beginning to understand the cost of every yes.

Chapter 5

Breaking Point

Everyone has a limit.

The problem is that most people don't discover theirs until they have already crossed it.

For years, I believed I could handle everything.

University.

Family responsibilities.

Friends.

Dreams.

Pressure.

Expectations.

I convinced myself that if I worked harder, stayed positive, and sacrificed a little more, everything would eventually fall into place.

But life doesn't always reward sacrifice.

Sometimes it simply takes more.

And more.

And more.

Until there is nothing left.

The breaking point arrived on an ordinary Thursday.

There was nothing special about the day.

No warning signs.

No dramatic event.

Just another day in the life I had built.

I woke up exhausted.

Not the kind of tiredness a cup of tea could fix.

A deeper exhaustion.

The kind that settles inside your bones.

The kind that follows you everywhere.

Still, I got out of bed.

Because responsibilities don't care how tired you are.

By afternoon, I was already overwhelmed.

Assignments were due.

Messages were waiting.

Family matters needed attention.

And somewhere between all of that, I was trying to find time for my own future.

Trying.

Failing.

Trying again.

That evening, I received an email.

It was an invitation to a startup networking event in Karachi.

Young entrepreneurs.

Investors.

Business owners.

People building the kinds of companies I dreamed about creating one day.

My heart raced.

This was exactly the type of opportunity I had been waiting for.

A chance to learn.

A chance to connect.

A chance to take one step closer toward my dream.

The event was scheduled for Saturday.

For the first time in months, I decided I would choose myself.

No excuses.

No cancellations.

No sacrifices.

I was going.

Saturday arrived.

Everything was ready.

My clothes.

My notes.

My plans.

Even my confidence.

Then the phone rang.

I looked at the screen.

A family member.

I closed my eyes.

For a few seconds, I simply stared.

Something inside me already knew what was about to happen.

The request came exactly as expected.

A favor.

An urgent need.

A responsibility that apparently couldn't wait.

As the conversation continued, I felt a familiar battle inside me.

One voice said:

"You deserve this opportunity."

The other said:

"They need you."

For years, the second voice had always won.

And once again, it did.

"Okay," I said quietly.

"I'll take care of it."

The event happened without me.

The opportunity disappeared.

And something inside me finally broke.

That night, I sat alone in my room.

No music.

No phone.

No distractions.

Just silence.

The same question kept repeating in my mind.

Why?

Why was it always my dreams that had to wait?

Why was it always my plans that got cancelled?

Why was it always my future that got sacrificed?

I wasn't angry at anyone.

That was the strange part.

I was angry at myself.

Because nobody had forced me.

Nobody had taken the opportunity away.

I had given it away.

Again.

The truth was impossible to ignore anymore.

I had become my own biggest obstacle.

Not because I lacked talent.

Not because I lacked ambition.

Because I lacked boundaries.

For years, I had treated every request like an emergency.

Every favor like an obligation.

Every expectation like a command.

And now I was paying the price.

I looked around my room.

The football boots in the corner.

The business ideas saved on my laptop.

The notebooks filled with goals.

The dreams that never seemed to move forward.

Suddenly, I felt tears running down my face.

Years of frustration.

Years of disappointment.

Years of pretending everything was okay.

All of it came crashing down at once.

I cried harder than I had in years.

Not because I was weak.

Because I was exhausted.

Tired of carrying everything.

Tired of disappointing myself.

Tired of watching life pass by while telling myself that tomorrow would be different.

The tears eventually stopped.

The silence returned.

And for the first time in my life, I admitted something I had been avoiding for years.

I couldn't continue living this way.

Something had to change.

Not next year.

Not next month.

Now.

Because if I continued saying yes to everyone else, there would be nothing left of me.

No dreams.

No goals.

No future.

Just a tired man spending his life solving problems that were never his to carry.

That night, before going to sleep, I opened my notebook.

On a blank page, I wrote three words.

Enough is enough.

I stared at them for a long time.

Then I closed the notebook.

Outside, the city lights continued shining.

Inside, a different light had appeared.

Small.

Fragile.

But real.

For the first time, I wasn't thinking about what everyone else wanted from me.

I was thinking about what I wanted from my life.

And that simple change would lead to the most difficult word I had ever spoken.

No.

Chapter 6

The First No

The next morning felt different.

Nothing around me had changed.

The same streets.

The same house.

The same responsibilities.

The same people.

Yet something inside me felt different.

For the first time in years, I had admitted the truth.

I was unhappy.

Not because of my family.

Not because of my friends.

Not because of my circumstances.

I was unhappy because I had abandoned myself.

That realization stayed with me throughout the day.

Every time my phone buzzed.

Every time someone asked for help.

Every time another responsibility appeared.

I found myself asking a simple question.

Can I actually do this?

For years, my answer had never mattered.

Only the other person's need mattered.

Now I was trying something new.

I was considering my own needs too.

It felt strange.

Almost selfish.

A week later, I experienced my first real test.

I had spent several evenings working on a business idea.

Nothing huge.

Just a small online service related to technology.

For the first time in a long time, I was making progress.

Every day I dedicated two hours to it.

No excuses.

No interruptions.

No delays.

The results surprised me.

The idea began taking shape.

My excitement returned.

My confidence returned.

A small part of me began believing in myself again.

Then one evening, just as I sat down to work, my phone rang.

A friend.

I answered.

"Assalamu Alaikum."

"Wa Alaikum Assalam, bro. I need a favor."

Of course.

A favor.

The old version of me would have agreed immediately.

Without thinking.

Without hesitation.

Without considering my own plans.

But this time, I paused.

My friend continued speaking.

He needed help with something that would take several hours.

Hours I had already planned to spend working on my business.

As he spoke, I felt the familiar guilt creeping into my chest.

The guilt of potentially disappointing someone.

The guilt I had spent years obeying.

Then I looked at my laptop.

I looked at the notes I had prepared.

I looked at the dream I had ignored for so long.

And for the first time in my life, I said something that felt impossible.

"I'm sorry, bro."

Silence.

My heart started racing.

"I can't today."

Another silence.

For a moment, I thought the world would collapse.

I thought he would be angry.

I thought our friendship would be ruined.

I thought everything would fall apart.

Instead, he simply replied.

"Oh."

A pause.

"No problem."

That was it.

No argument.

No anger.

No disaster.

The conversation ended a few minutes later.

I placed my phone on the table.

Then I just sat there.

Staring.

Breathing.

Trying to process what had happened.

I had said no.

And somehow the world was still turning.

The sky hadn't fallen.

Nobody had disowned me.

Nobody had abandoned me.

The fear I had carried for years suddenly seemed smaller.

Not gone.

But smaller.

That night, I worked on my business for nearly three hours.

More importantly, I felt proud.

Not because I had rejected someone.

Because I had finally respected my own time.

The following weeks brought more opportunities to practice.

Some people understood immediately.

Others didn't.

A few seemed surprised.

One or two became frustrated.

I quickly learned an important lesson.

People become comfortable with the version of you that always says yes.

When you change, some people struggle to accept it.

At first, that bothered me.

Then I realized something.

The people who truly cared about me respected my boundaries.

The people who only cared about what I could do for them were the ones who became upset.

That realization changed everything.

One afternoon, I was walking home after football practice.

Football practice.

Even saying those words felt strange.

For years, football had been an occasional hobby.

Now I was making time for it regularly.

Not because I expected to become famous.

Not because I expected to become professional.

Because it made me happy.

And for once, that was enough.

As I walked through the streets of Karachi, I felt lighter.

The responsibilities were still there.

The challenges were still there.

The expectations were still there.

But something had changed.

I was no longer carrying them alone.

I was no longer sacrificing every part of myself.

For the first time in years, my dreams had a place in my life again.

That evening, my mother noticed the difference.

"You seem happier these days," she said.

I smiled.

"I think I am."

She looked at me carefully.

"Good."

That single word meant more than she probably realized.

Because for years, I had believed that choosing myself would disappoint the people I loved.

Instead, I was discovering something unexpected.

The healthier I became, the better son, brother, and friend I became as well.

The truth was simple.

You cannot pour from an empty cup.

For years, mine had been empty.

Now, little by little, I was filling it again.

The journey wasn't over.

Far from it.

There were still difficult conversations ahead.

Still fears to overcome.

Still habits to break.

But the hardest part was done.

I had spoken the word that terrified me most.

No.

And in doing so, I had finally started saying yes to myself.

Chapter 7

Rebuilding

For years, I believed that saying no would make me selfish.

What I didn't realize was that constantly saying yes had been hurting me—and eventually, it would have hurt the people I loved too.

Change didn't happen overnight.

I didn't wake up one morning as a completely different person.

There were still moments when guilt appeared.

Still moments when I wanted to agree to everything.

Still moments when disappointing someone felt unbearable.

But now, I paused before answering.

That pause changed everything.

Instead of immediately saying yes, I asked myself a question.

Can I do this without sacrificing something important?

If the answer was yes, I helped.

If the answer was no, I was honest.

Simple.

Not easy.

But simple.

Slowly, life began to feel different.

The extra hours I protected each week started adding up.

Hours that once belonged to everyone else now belonged to my future.

I spent them learning.

Building.

Planning.

Growing.

My business idea was no longer just a collection of notes.

It was becoming something real.

A website.

A plan.

A vision.

Every small step gave me confidence.

Not because I was making money.

Because I was finally keeping promises to myself.

For years, I had broken every promise I made to myself.

Tomorrow, I'll work on my dream.

Tomorrow, I'll focus on my goals.

Tomorrow, I'll make time for football.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow never came.

Until now.

One evening, I opened the notebook that had followed me through some of the hardest years of my life.

Inside were pages filled with unfinished plans.

Missed opportunities.

Abandoned goals.

Doubts.

Fears.

I turned page after page.

Then I reached the sentence I had written months earlier.

"My dreams matter too."

I smiled.

For the first time, I actually believed it.

The changes weren't only happening in my career.

They were happening on the football field too.

I started playing more regularly.

Not professionally.

Not at a high level.

But consistently.

Every match reminded me why I had fallen in love with the sport in the first place.

The joy.

The freedom.

The challenge.

The feeling of being completely present.

When I played football, I wasn't worrying about responsibilities.

I wasn't thinking about expectations.

I wasn't trying to please anyone.

I was simply living in the moment.

And after years of pressure, that feeling was priceless.

One weekend, while sitting with my sisters, we started talking about the future.

The conversation moved from careers to dreams.

From goals to fears.

From plans to possibilities.

At one point, one of my sisters looked at me and smiled.

"You seem different these days."

I laughed.

"Different how?"

"Happier."

The answer surprised me.

Not because she said it.

Because she was right.

For so long, happiness had felt like something waiting in the future.

Something I would experience after solving every problem.

After fulfilling every responsibility.

After helping everyone else.

But happiness doesn't work that way.

Life doesn't wait until everything is perfect.

It happens in the middle of the struggle.

In the small victories.

In the quiet moments.

In the decision to value yourself as much as you value others.

That lesson changed me.

Months passed.

My confidence continued growing.

Not because life became easier.

Life remained difficult.

There were still responsibilities.

Still financial pressures.

Still challenges.

But now I faced them differently.

I was no longer carrying the weight of the world alone.

I had finally learned that being responsible does not mean being available all the time.

Being kind does not mean saying yes to everything.

And loving your family does not require abandoning yourself.

Those lessons came slowly.

Painfully.

But they came.

One evening, after finishing a football match, I sat alone on the sidelines watching the sun disappear beyond the horizon.

The sky glowed with shades of orange and gold.

For a moment, everything felt peaceful.

I thought about the person I had been.

The young man who believed his worth depended on how much he sacrificed.

The young man who feared disappointing people more than disappointing himself.

The young man who thought boundaries were selfish.

I felt grateful for him.

Because he had good intentions.

He loved deeply.

He cared deeply.

He simply didn't know any better.

Now he did.

The journey wasn't over.

There was still more growth ahead.

More challenges.

More lessons.

But I was no longer lost.

For the first time in a very long time, I knew who I was.

Not just a son.

Not just a brother.

Not just a friend.

Not just someone who solved problems.

I was Abdul Rafay.

A young man with dreams.

A young man with goals.

A young man learning that his own life deserved a place in his priorities too.

And that realization changed everything.

Chapter 8

The Man Who Learned to Say No

A year earlier, if someone had asked me who I was, I would have described myself through my responsibilities.

A son.

A brother.

A student.

A friend.

Someone people could depend on.

But I would never have mentioned myself.

Because for most of my life, I had forgotten that I mattered too.

Looking back, I understand why.

I loved my family.

I wanted to help people.

I wanted to be useful.

There is nothing wrong with those things.

The problem begins when helping others becomes your entire identity.

When your worth depends on how much you sacrifice.

When every yes costs you a piece of yourself.

For years, that was the life I lived.

A life where everyone else's dreams came first.

A life where my own goals were always postponed.

A life where saying no felt impossible.

But now, things were different.

Not perfect.

Different.

And sometimes, different is enough.

One afternoon, I received a phone call.

A familiar situation.

A familiar request.

A familiar opportunity to abandon my own plans.

Except this time, I had something important scheduled.

A meeting related to my business project.

Weeks of preparation had gone into it.

The old Abdul Rafay would have cancelled immediately.

Without hesitation.

Without thinking.

Without considering the consequences.

This time, I listened carefully.

Then I took a deep breath.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"I can't today."

The words came out calmly.

Naturally.

Without fear.

Without guilt.

Without shame.

For a moment, there was silence.

Then came an answer that surprised me.

"Okay. No problem."

That was it.

No argument.

No anger.

No disappointment.

The conversation ended.

And suddenly I started laughing.

Not because it was funny.

Because I had spent years fearing reactions that often never came.

Years of anxiety.

Years of guilt.

Years of pressure.

Built around assumptions.

The truth was simple.

Most people respected boundaries when they were communicated honestly.

And those who didn't?

Those were often the people who benefited most from your lack of boundaries.

That realization changed how I saw relationships.

Healthy relationships don't require constant sacrifice.

They require honesty.

Respect.

Balance.

The business project continued growing.

Slowly.

Not dramatically.

But steadily.

Each small achievement felt meaningful.

Not because of the results.

Because I had earned them.

By protecting my time.

By respecting my goals.

By believing that my future deserved attention too.

Football remained part of my life as well.

Not as a professional career.

Not as the dream I once imagined.

But as something equally valuable.

A reminder.

A reminder that life is meant to be lived, not merely survived.

A reminder that joy matters.

A reminder that happiness is not selfish.

Some dreams change.

Some evolve.

And that's okay.

The important thing is that they remain alive.

One evening, I sat with my family during dinner.

The conversation was simple.

Laughter filled the room.

Stories were shared.

Nothing extraordinary happened.

Yet I felt something I hadn't felt in years.

Peace.

Real peace.

Not the temporary satisfaction that comes from pleasing everyone.

Not the relief that follows another sacrifice.

Something deeper.

The peace that comes from living honestly.

The peace that comes from respecting yourself.

The peace that comes from balance.

As I looked around the table, I realized something important.

Learning to say no had not made me love my family less.

It had not made me selfish.

It had not made me a bad son.

If anything, it had made me stronger.

Healthier.

More present.

More capable of helping when it truly mattered.

For years, I thought saying no would damage the relationships I cared about.

Instead, it improved the relationship I had with myself.

And that changed everything.

Later that night, I opened the notebook that had accompanied me through my journey.

The same notebook filled with dreams.

Questions.

Doubts.

Fears.

I turned to one of the earliest pages.

The page where I had written:

Build a business.

Support my family.

Become the best version of myself.

For a long moment, I stared at those words.

Then I smiled.

Because I finally understood something.

Success was never about choosing between my dreams and the people I loved.

It was about creating a life where both could exist.

A life where helping others did not require abandoning myself.

A life where kindness included self-respect.

A life where love included boundaries.

At the bottom of the page, I wrote one final sentence.

"The man who could never say no finally learned when to."

I closed the notebook.

Outside, Karachi continued moving beneath the night sky.

Cars filled the streets.

People chased dreams.

Life moved forward.

And so did I.

Not as the person I once was.

But as the person I was becoming.

A man who still loved deeply.

Still cared deeply.

Still helped whenever he could.

But a man who finally understood that his own dreams mattered too.

A man who learned that sometimes the most powerful word in the world is a simple one.

No.

And sometimes, saying no to others is the first step toward saying yes to your own life.

Epilogue

If there is one lesson I hope you take from this book, it is this:

You do not have to destroy yourself in order to prove your love for others.

You do not have to sacrifice every dream.

You do not have to carry every burden.

You do not have to earn your worth through exhaustion.

Kindness is beautiful.

Generosity is beautiful.

Helping others is beautiful.

But not when it costs you your entire life.

For years, I believed that saying no made me selfish.

Today, I understand something different.

Boundaries are not walls.

They are bridges.

They allow us to help others without losing ourselves.

They allow us to love without resentment.

They allow us to grow without guilt.

My journey is not perfect.

I am still learning.

Still growing.

Still making mistakes.

But I no longer fear disappointing people as much as I fear disappointing myself.

And that has made all the difference.

To anyone reading this who constantly puts themselves last:

Your dreams matter.

Your time matters.

Your happiness matters.

And your life matters too.

Never forget that.

— Abdul Rafay

Acknowledgments

To my parents,

Thank you for your sacrifices, love, and guidance.

To my sisters,

Thank you for your encouragement and support.

To my friends,

Thank you for the lessons, memories, and challenges that helped shape me.

And to every reader,

Thank you for giving your time to this story.

— Abdul Rafay

Abdul Rafay has spent his entire life saying yes.

Yes to family.
Yes to friends.
Yes to expectations.

But with every yes, he moves further away from his own dreams.

As the pressure of responsibility grows, Abdul must confront a difficult truth: helping everyone else may be costing him the life he wants for himself.

The Man Who Could Never Say No is an inspiring story about ambition, family, sacrifice, and the courage to set boundaries.

Sometimes the most powerful word a person can learn is “NO.”

About the Author

Abdul Rafay is a writer and computer engineering student based in Karachi, Pakistan.

With a strong interest in entrepreneurship, technology, and personal development, he enjoys creating stories that explore real-life challenges and meaningful life lessons.

The Man Who Could Never Say No is his first novel.

Through his writing, Abdul hopes to inspire readers to pursue their dreams, value themselves, and find balance between helping others and staying true to their own goals.